

N^o 21. *Friday, February 17.*

*Curse on his Virtues! They have undone his Country.
Such popular Humanity is Treason.*

CATO.



Popular Affection, when justly obtained, (that is, by truly promoting the Interest of the People) is the highest Honour, which a Mortal can enjoy, and one of the surest Marks of publick Felicity; for when a Man possesses the general Love of any Community, it is natural to infer that the Community esteem him their general Benefactor; and certainly no Respect, Honours or Reward, which the People can bestow, are too great to testify their Gratitude to Him, who approves himself worthy of that Character.

Popularity therefore, in this Sense, on this Foundation, and under these Restrictions, is due to every *true Patriot* (a Character, indeed, somewhat scarce!) and is a good presumptive Proof of the Happiness of that Nation, under which it is obtained. But this desirable Blessing is so often acquired by false Means, bestowed on worthless Objects, and apply'd to bad Ends, that an honest *Briton* cannot be too cautious on whom he confers it, nor how he is influenced by it, when conferr'd by others. The vulgar Multitude judge honestly of publick Affairs, as far as they come within their Knowledge; and, having no Hopes of sharing in the Administration themselves, desire only to live quietly and easily, in the free Enjoyment of what they daily earn; incumbered with as few Taxes and Drawbacks, as the real Necessities of the Pub-

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lick will admit. For this Reason they always respect, and, in a manner, venerate Those, who seem to consult their Interest, and endeavour to preserve them in the secure Possession of their Rights and Privileges. But they are so liable to be imposed on by false Shews, and artful Pretences, that we are not always to look upon their Favour as the Badge of real Patriotism, and a truly publick Spirit; for, on the contrary, we shall find that it is too often acquired by sinister Methods, in order to carry on some crafty and pernicious Design. The wisest and best constituted Governments of old (especially the famous Republicks of *Greece* and *Rome*) were so sensible of This, that it was made criminal for any of their Members to affect uncommon *Popularity*, and conciliate too much the Minds of their Fellow-subjects. Accordingly we find, in their Histories, several Instances of the most eminent Patriots, who were banished, and otherwise treated as Enemies to their Country, only for rendring themselves too much beloved by general Largesses and Donations, or other extraordinary Acts of publick Beneficence; for which Severities those Nations have been often reproached, by succeeding Ages, with Injustice, Barbarity, and Ingratitude; but if we examine their Conduct, in this Particular, with Candour and Impartiality, I believe we shall find that they acted a very prudent and commendable Part. They seemed to judge very rightly of human Nature. They knew the Temptations of *Power*, and how *Popularity* is apt to turn the wisest Heads, and corrupt the purest Hearts; for which Reason, they thought it impolitic to let the most deserving of their Fellow-subjects possess a Power, which he might turn against them, or trust their Liberties to the private Virtue and Integrity of any Man whatsoever.

Indeed, the Histories of all Nations, as well as of theirs, abound with so many Instances, in which the Favour of the People has been most traiterously abused

fed and perverted to wicked Purposes, that, to a serious and thoughtful Mind, their Conduct stands in need of no Justification; for whenever we read of any great professed Patriot, who falls under signal Disgrace or Punishment, on Account of his popular Interest and Esteem, though acquired by the justest Methods, we ought not to interpret it as proceeding from any ill Will to Virtue or publick Good; but as the Effect of political Precaution, and of the Jealousy of a wise People for their ancient Rights and Liberties.

But there is another sort of *Popularity*, which is infinitely more dangerous than what I have been speaking of, and has been more studied, in these latter Ages, by ambitious and designing Men. I mean *Popularity* among the *chief Persons* of any Nation; which becomes still more dangerous and vile, when it is cultivated by *venal* and *corrupt Methods*. This is indeed the most comprehensive Method of becoming popular, as it saves abundance of Trouble in cajoling the Affections of the Vulgar, and stooping to a thousand little pleasing Arts, to which some modern great Spirits do not care to submit.

A Man, who sets up for a diffusive and universal Love of the People, must put himself under several uneasy Restraints in his Behaviour, and guide every Action of his Life with the utmost Caution, Tenderness, and Circumspection. He must be courteous, affable and generous; must submit to the wayward Tempers of a fickle Multitude, and adapt himself to every Character. He must be *all Things to all Men*, and humour them in all their various Appetites, different Views, and fantastical Opinions. He must humble himself to the Pride of the lofty; consult the Interest of the avaritious; and conform to the Intemperance of the Libertine. He must drink or pray, whore or cant, be a Saint or a Sinner, just as

his Company shall please to prescribe, or set him an Example.

Whereas a Man, who is Master of the other compendious Method, and has it in his Power to put it in Practice, will find no Occasion to study the Inclinations of the People, nor even so much as pretend to a Zeal for their Interest. He knows a much shorter Way to compass his Designs, by bringing over a whole *Borough*, a *City*, or a *County* at once into his Interest; and obtaining, by these Means, the general Assent of the Nation to his own ambitious Designs. He becomes, in this Sense, very *popular*, at the same Time that he is universally *odious*, and retains the *Vox Populi* on his Side, in spite of their Teeth.

Nor is it at all difficult to accomplish such a Design, in a vicious and depraved Age, when Profuseness, Extravagance, and a general Spirit of Libertinism grow predominant in any Nation; especially among Persons of a superiour Rank, who are intrusted with the Rights and Liberties of the People; for when once Luxury has fix'd a deep Root in their Minds, it will soon get the better of their noble Faculties. It will emasculate, soften and melt down all those stubborn Virtues, which are the natural Effects of Temperance and Frugality; the Consequence of which is, that a Man thus debauched and effeminated will, in order to support himself in the same vicious Manner, fall into any Measures, which are dictated to him with a Prospect of Advantage, and sacrifice the most valuable Rights of his Country for a fashionable Town-house, a splendid Equipage and an elegant Table.

But as it is very easy for any Man in Power to acquire this sort of *popular Affection*; so it is hardly possible to withstand its Influence, or disappoint its Designs.

There are some Hopes that a Man, who arrives at *Popularity*, by Courteousness, Affability, and a munificent

nificent Spirit, may really be in earnest, and exert these amiable Virtues from a natural good Disposition, and without any private View ; for it is possible, at least, even in this Age, that a disinterested Zeal for the publick Good may be the prevailing Passion in some Breasts ; and that there may still exist a few particular Men, in whom the innate Love of their Country remains uncorrupted with any sordid and mercenary Considerations. There may be others, who, though they have not the same noble and sincere Affection for the Publick, yet are fond of *Popularity*, for the sake of *Popularity*, and find their Ambition sufficiently gratify'd by the Shouts and Acclamations of a numerous Multitude. Nay, even supposing that a Man endeavours to insinuate himself into the *popular Favour*, with a bad Design ; yet, if he does not attempt it by corrupting the *Leaders* and *Guardians* of the People, the Danger to the Publick is not very great ; for it is impossible for the craftiest Brain to impose very long on the Majority of a Nation. He may, for some Time, reign in Esteem, and trapan the Affections of his Countrymen by plausible Pretences, artful Declarations, and a seeming Concern for their Service ; but when his latent Designs appear, (as at length they must) the People will withdraw their Affections ; his general *Popularity* will be turn'd into a general *Odium* ; and he will feel the Resentments and Indignation of Those, whose Favour he has abused.

But the Case is quite otherwise with Those, who make themselves popular by *venal* and *corrupt* Methods. *Money*, the Root of all Evil, is also the strongest *Cement* in the World. It binds together Persons of the most opposite Complexions, and is a more lasting Tie than Honour, Friendship, Relation, Consanguinity or Unity of Affections. When any Person therefore takes an annual or other Salary for giving his Opinion that *black* is *white*, it is in vain

for us to endeavour to convince him of the contrary. Persuasion to such a Man is of no effect, and Reasoning is thrown away upon him. The strongest Arguments leave no Impression on his Mind, and the clearest Truth has no Charms in his Eyes. He is enlisted in the Service of his Patron, and must always fight on that Side, let the Cause be what it will, from which he receives his Pay. It is ridiculous to talk of *Right* to a Man, who is præ-engaged, and hired to judge *wrong*; or to argue about Justice, Conscience, and Equity with one, who has tasted the Sweets of acting upon different Principles.

It is a Labour more difficult than any, which *Hercules* overcame, to prove that there is any inherent Malignity in a *good Place*; or that any Actions can be unjust, or any Arguments invalid, which are supported and enforced with the Rhetorick of a *thousand Pounds a Year*.

Ambitious and ill-designing Men, in former Ages, were not ignorant of This. They knew how precarious, as well as troublesome, that sort of *Popularity* is, which subsists only upon the Foundation of worthy Actions; and how permanent That, which is established upon Self-interest, Bribery and Subornation.

Tacitus informs us, that *Augustus* paved his Way to Dominion by these Methods; for having laid aside the Title of *Triumvir*, and taking upon himself only the Character of *Consul*, under a specious Pretence that he had nothing at Heart but the good of the People (whose Favour he at first cultivated by several generous Actions,) He grew *insolent* by Degrees, and at length engrossed the whole Power of the Empire into his own Hands—*Insurgere paulatim; munia senatus, magistratuum, legum in se trahere, nullo adversante; cum ferocissimi per acies aut proscriptione cecidissent; cæteri nobilium, quanto quis servitio promptior, opibus & honoribus extollerentur; ac novis ex rebus aucti, tuta & præsentia, quam vetera & periculosa mallent.* Ne-
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que provinciæ illum rerum statum abnuebant, suspecto senatûs, populique imperio ob certamina potentium & avaritiam magistratuum; invalido legum auxilio, quævi, ambitu, postremo PECUNIA turbabantur.

We had, not many Years ago, an Instance amongst ourselves of a *great Man*, who supported himself in Power, for several Years together, by the same Methods; the most shining Part of whose Character consisted in an easy, insinuating Address, and his skilful Management of *popular Assemblies*. He was particularly famous for a certain happy Talent at finding out the *weak Sides* of Mankind, and his Dexterity in applying a *Bribe*; for having been used to take Money himself, in a *corrupt Manner*, before he was in Power, he knew by Experience the most *genteel* and *agreeable* Method of offering it to others. But History informs us that, notwithstanding the Assistance of immense Sums of *Money*, which procured him great Veneration in a *certain Place*, whilst living; yet his Death occasioned a general Joy, even among some of his most abandoned Creatures (who, at length, grew weary of his Yoke) and the Memory of his Name and Actions hath been ever since held in universal Abhorrence.

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